DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 902 CE 070 415

TITLE	Students in Danger: Gender-Based Violence in Our Schools.
INSTITUTION	Ohio State Univ., Columbus. Center for Sex Equity.
SPONS AGENCY	Ohio State Dept. of Education, Columbus. Div. of Vocational and Adult Education.
PUB DATE	96
NOTE	9p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Information Analyses (070)
JOURNAL CIT	Equity Issues; v2 n1 Win 1996
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Aggression; Equal Education; Family Violence; Homophobia; *Role of Education; *School Security; Secondary Education; Sex Bias; *Sex Role; Sex Stereotypes; *Sexual Harassment; *Violence; Vocational Education; Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS	*Sex Based Violence

ABSTRACT

This newsletter examines the causes, consequences, and prevention of gender-based violence. First, gender-based violence is defined and common examples are presented. Discussed next are the following factors associated with gender-based violence: the culture continually reinforces the notions of male aggressiveness/power/dominance and female passivity/weakness/submissiveness; research indicates that males tend to be more violent than females; gender-based violence often results from expression of emotions in inappropriate ways; and increasingly violent role models reinforce gender-based violence. The role of education/schools in promoting and reinforcing gender-based violence is examined along with the following consequences of gender-based violence: diminished education, increased isolation, loss of self-esteem, vulnerability at work, and generational impact. Listed next are five key concepts to include in training for teachers and other staff regarding legal and trust/safety issues related to gender-based violence. Nine actions that schools/teachers can take to combat gender-based violence (including exhibiting/expecting mutually respectful nonviolent behavior, using gender-neutral language and nonsexist instructional materials, assigning chores/duties without regard to sex, discussing gender-based violence with students, and creating an environment ensuring confidentiality and nonjudgment) are discussed. Also included are research findings regarding sexual harassment and homophobic, date, and domestic violence. Contains 18 references. (MN)

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Equity Issues
Ohio Vocational Sex Equity

Volume 2 Issue 1
Winter 1996

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Students in Danger: Gender-Based Violence in Our Schools

How often do you hear students ...

- *Discussing their boyfriends' and/or girlfriends' abusive behavior?*
- *Make sexually-harassing comments toward one another?*
- *Make homophobic comments toward students in nontraditional vocational programs?*
- *Talk about domestic violence in your community?*

School violence used to create images of the class bully who would knock down a classmate before or after school and the two students would soon find themselves in the principal's office. Today images of weapons, shootings, fights, threats, verbal slurs, and defiant behavior come to mind. Violence is a part of daily life in the United States, infiltrating our families, schools, and communities. Yet, with all the attention given to violence, educators and others can easily overlook and minimize one underlying cause of violence—gender-based violence.

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is any action or word intended to cause hurt, emotional or physical, to a person or to groups of people because of their gender (Hanson, 1995). Gender-based violence is not unique to any race, class, or ethnic group and is prevalent in every community. It includes verbal slurs, threats, homophobic remarks or gestures, sexual harassment, dating violence, battering, rape, domestic violence, and murder. Unfortunately, people often perceive and treat these types of violence as the fault of the victim rather than as the inappropriate aggression of the perpetrator. For example, when discussing an abusive relationship, people often say "Why doesn't she just leave him?" instead of "How could he do this to her?" They usually do not deal with the underlying issues of gender stereotypes, rigid role expectations, and the use of power and control. Educators and others must learn to view gender-based violence as "... a social issue with deep roots in how we view one another as males and females" (Hanson, 1995, p. 3).

Gender-based violence stems from our socialization of males to be dominant and have power and control and females to be passive and submissive. Females are the primary victims although males are victims too. Women who are in relationships characterized by gender-based violence tend to experience repeated sexual assaults and coercion within their intimate relationships. In homophobic violence, adolescent males are the primary victims and the perpetrators are typically male.

The severity of gender-based violence may vary in different situations. For example, the male partner in a dating relationship may show jealousy, possessiveness, and/or controlling behavior to the female partner. That behavior is considered gender-based violence the same as a male partner physically hitting and/or raping the female partner. Though the degree to which the female partner appears to be hurt may seem less, this behavior is still within the continuum of gender-based violence.

Four Factors of Gender-Based Violence

Our culture continually reinforces norms that males should be aggressive, powerful, unemotional, controlling, and domineering and that females should be passive, weak, emotional, flexible, and submissive. "Gender-based violence is fueled by deeply held beliefs that define females and males in rigid, limiting ways" (Hanson, 1995, p. 3). Certain careers and jobs choices, the division of labor in household management practices, and child-rearing responsibilities define gender-role stereotypes that are difficult to challenge in our culture. Adolescents internalize these cultural norms that, in turn, increase "... their vulnerability to experiencing violence and abuse, as victims and/or perpetrators" (Robbin, 1992, p. 2).

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Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that includes any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. The unwanted sexual or gender-based behavior occurs when one person has formal or informal power over the other (Sandler, 1994).

In a survey commissioned by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (Harris, 1993), the researchers reported that

- Four in five (81%) 8th through 11th grade public school students have experienced some form of sexual harassment in their school lives. Of these, 85 percent were girls and 76 percent were boys.
- The hallway and classrooms are the most common places harassment occurs.
- Most harassment is student-to-student with nearly four in five (79%) students harassing peers.

Lisa is the only girl in the junior machine trades program. Her instructor does not believe that girls belong in his program. The boys harass Lisa by writing sexual comments about her on the locker room wall. They call her "whore" and "slut" in front of other students and they put dead rats in her lab coat pocket. Her instructor encourages this behavior, saying that the boys are "only preparing her for the real world."

Some male students have formed a "girl-watching line" where the boys line up with signs and rate the girls as they walk into the cafeteria for lunch. The boys assign low scores to girls who are unpopular or who have average looks and assign high scores to popular and attractive girls. The boys also howl or bark like dogs when the girls walk by. This behavior offends some girls so that they avoid the cafeteria entirely, choosing to not eat lunch rather than go through this humiliation. The staff member on duty says that it's all in good fun and that "boys will be boys."

In addition, evidence suggests that our culture socializes men to be more violent. Our culture encourages boys to be determined, assertive, and "almost obsessionally competitive and concerned with dominance" (Miedzian, 1991, p. 42). Sports, fraternities, gangs and other male subcultures support the use of violence in their activities, transmitting the masculine norms (Messner and Sabo, 1994).

Our culture also expects males to prove their manhood, a process that involves competition and dominance. For example,

> [p]roving manhood on the job may mean a man can't let a woman do the same work he does (it's a man's work). He can't compete with her (if he wins, he's no gentleman; if she wins, he's not much of a man). He can't take orders from her (he's supposed to control her, not the other way around) (Smith, 1994, p.3).

" 'Gender-based violence is fueled by deeply held beliefs that define females and males in rigid, limiting ways.' "

And the male is supposed to "score" although the female he is with is supposed to "resist." These hidden expectations to prove manhood can create frustrations that may lead to either very subtle or very open violence toward women. "For many, violence becomes a way to verify that they are, in fact, 'men.' Violence becomes a way to earn respect, to make an impact, to get what they want" (Robbin, 1992, p. 9).

On the other hand, our culture socializes women to be more accepting of men's violent behavior, especially toward them. In addition, "there is still a widely held belief that women provoke violence or are somehow deserving of abuse" (Robbin, 1992, p. 2). Girls learn to "be quiet, stand still, and take whatever is given to them" (Robbin, 1992, p. 4). They may be emotionally passive and cooperative, expecting protection from men. Females often do not talk nor seek help for gender-based violence due to shame, isolation, or terror. They may feel they caused the violence, deserved it, must stop it themselves, and/or fear reprisal.

Instead of teaching girls and boys that they must *earn* their gender, our culture needs to affirm each person for his or her own uniqueness. Then we can teach girls and

boys – women and men – to work together well and to accept each other for the qualities they bring to the classroom, job, and family life.

Research indicates that males have tendencies to be more violent than females. Many research studies debate the biological differences between males and females in relation to violent behavior. The results of these studies suggest that there is a difference in tendencies toward violence based on gender. Males tend to show more violent behavior than females. According to the *Uniform Crime Reports* (1990), men commit almost 90 percent of violent crimes. However, that does not mean that all men are violent. Miedzian (1991) states it this way:

> To say that men as a group are more violent than women is by no means to assert that all men are violent, violence-prone, or accepting of violence as a way of resolving conflicts and attaining power. It means only that a significantly higher percentage of men than women exhibit these tendencies. This in no way denies that a large percentage of men are not violent at all, that a certain percentage of women are violent, or that some women are more violent than some men. (p. 5)

Gender-based violence is often a result of emotions expressed in inappropriate ways. Men tend to conceal their emotions, decreasing sensitivity to their feelings and feelings of others. They may disguise feelings they have revealed, reducing the intensity of feelings with a joke, witty comment, or offhand remark and often at the expense of another person's feelings. Anger becomes manifested in violent behavior rather than dealt with as an emotion. On the other hand, women may express their emotions more readily. However, they often internalize their emotions that then become manifested in quiet behavior such as eating disorders, depression, unestablished sexual boundaries, etc. Inappropriate expressions of emotions often lead to control issues for males and passivity issues for females.

Homophobic Violence

Homophobic violence is violently acting out fears, the aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuals or *perceived homosexuals* (emphasis added). There is a prevalent (and often inaccurate) assumption that when a person develops career interests traditionally associated with the opposite sex, then the person must be a homosexual. There is also a prevalent (and often inaccurate) assumption that when a person has personality traits that are usually associated with the opposite sex, then the person must also be a homosexual. When females enroll in auto mechanics or males enroll in child care programs, peers and teachers may think that the students are not sufficiently "feminine" or "masculine." It is critical to understand that career choices do not *make* someone masculine or feminine, nor do career choices determine a person's sexual orientation.

- Boys are twice as likely as girls to be targets of homophobic harassment, and they are the least likely to report the abuse due to the intense pressure for them to conform to male gender-based stereotypes of not asking for help, and of not being vulnerable in any way (Hanson, 1995).

- The AAUW study, *Hostile Hallways* (Harris, 1993), noted that boys are much more upset by harassment involving accusations of homosexuality (name-calling such as "faggot," "queer," etc.) than by any other form of harassment.

Ben is a soft-spoken, thin cosmetology student. He is well-liked by his teacher and peers in the program. However, when he walks down the hall or into the parking lot some of the boys in the school taunt him, calling him "fag," "homo," and "queer-bait." Recently, Ben discovered the words, "Fags must die," written on his locker and he has been receiving harassing phone calls at home. Ben is afraid he will be hurt if he does not drop out of cosmetology.

Cheryl is a welding student who wants to be a great welder just like her father. She is attractive and does well in her program. Some boys in the welding program developed crushes on her and asked her out on dates. When she politely refused, the boys became offended and decided that if she does not want to date them, she must be a lesbian. The boys have become very rude, calling her "dyke" and writing "lezzy" and "homo" on her locker. They shove her when she is welding, calling it an "accident." Three of the boys have decided that she needs to be "taught a lesson" and are planning to assault her in the parking lot Friday.

Dating Violence

Dating violence is a pattern of repeated actual or threatened acts that physically, sexually or verbally abuses a member of a couple who are dating. "At the center of any abusive dating relationship are destructive and unhealthy dynamics of power and control" (Children's Safety Network, 1993, p. 2). Date rape is a form of dating violence that is a sexually aggressive act that attempts and/or completes forced intercourse between a dating couple or while on a date. Acquaintance rape is forced sexual intercourse or other sexual acts between two people who know each other. According to Levy (1991),

- Approximately one out of ten high school students experiences physical violence in a dating relationship.
- More than 70 percent of pregnant or parenting teens are beaten by their boyfriends.
- Date rape accounts for 60 percent of all reported rapes; the majority of date rape victims are between the ages of 16 and 24.

Emily is 15-years old and is in love with her boyfriend, Matt, who is 17-years old. Matt calls Emily every day, walks her to all her classes, and waits for her after school. He is attentive and becomes upset when Emily talks to her friends, especially other boys. Classmates view them as the "perfect couple." However, Matt has slapped Emily several times. He even slapped her in front of her two best friends, Kiesha and Tara. After they saw Matt slap Emily, they tried to talk Emily into breaking up with Matt. Emily tried to break up with Matt but he refused, saying Emily was the only one who understood him and he loved her. Emily tried to break up again but Matt started making threats and following her. He told other boys not to date her. Emily became so uncomfortable with Matt's behavior that she started to isolate herself, skip school, and avoid school social activities.

Latasha and Nikko went out on their first date together. After they went to a movie, Nikko invited Latasha back to his house to meet his parents. When they arrived, the house was dark and his parents were not home. Nikko asked Latasha to come in and watch TV. As they were sitting on the sofa, Nikko started kissing Latasha. She hesitantly responded, kissing him lightly. Then Nikko pushed her down on the sofa so he was on top of her. Latasha said, "No way, get off." However, Nikko became more forceful, ripping off her clothes and forcing intercourse.

Increasingly violent role models reinforces gender-based violence. Our culture tolerates and accepts violent behavior of media characters, sports heroes, political figures, and the favorite teacher more today than in the past. These role models also communicate rigid stereotypical roles. Television and other media often depict women as sex objects and as appropriate objects of violence. "American adolescents view nearly 14,000 instances of sexual material each year. In action and adventure shows, heterosexual sexual behavior is often associated with violence or a display of power" (CPO, 1991). Many adolescents then begin to believe and accept that love and violence go together in relationships.

Because of these factors, men receive many negative messages about how they should behave toward women. "These include *dominance*, the feeling of always wanting to be on top; *entitlement*, feeling that they deserve something simply because they are men; and *objectification*, seeing women as objects instead of three-dimensional living beings" (Robbin, 1992, p. 4). By its very nature, education has a responsibility and an opportunity to change these very messages and, ultimately, alter every student's life.

The Role of Education

Schools are a reflection of our culture, including its rigid sex-role stereotyping of males and females. As microcosms of our larger society, schools create arenas to instill these cultural norms, expectations, and assumptions in students.

Schools also claim to be safe places. Federal laws dictate that school climate and teaching practices are safe and equitable. When educators tolerate any type of violence to any degree, schools are not safe places. Educators need to take students' complaints about gender-based violence seriously.

Unfortunately, school environment can promote and enable gender-based violence. Research studies show that teachers' expectations of student behavior and achieve-

Our culture needs to affirm each person for his or her own uniqueness instead of teaching girls and boys that they must *earn* their gender.

ment differ between boys and girls. Teachers tend to give boys more time and attention, have boys do more physical work, tolerate boys' acting-out behavior more, and praise boys for their work performance. In contrast, teachers tend to give girls less time and attention, have girls do more clerical work, reward girls for doing what they are told and acting quietly, and praise girls for the neatness of their work (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). As Hanson (1995) states:

> These practices send very different messages to males and females about their worth, their abilities, and their potential. It is not surprising then that males learn to reject supposedly "feminine" qualities of cooperation and sensitivity in favor of competition and objectivity. This kind of socialization lays the foundation for gender expectations based on male domination and female subordination. (p. 5)

Schools may reinforce gender-role stereotyping and potential violence by not discussing the issues. In addition, adults often minimize the intensity of adolescent relationships and the potential violence within those relationships. By ignoring these issues, teachers give credence to gender-role stereotyping, violence, and the privacy of the issues. This, in turn, reinforces the shame that victims often feel.

Education has an important role in the prevention and intervention of gender-based violence because school is such a critical component of students' lives. Administrators, teachers, and staff need to understand the costs of gender-based violence for the students, teachers, employers, and community members.

Consequences of Gender-Based Violence

The consequences of gender-based violence have serious implications for educators. School personnel and systems may face lawsuits, resulting from equity and safety concerns. Ultimately at stake is the education of each student. Consequences with long-term implications for each student include:

A Diminished Education—Students cannot concentrate or participate fully in class or on learning when they feel intimidated, fearful, and/or unsafe. Because students often sit in class with their perpetrators, they might choose to drop out rather than face daily interactions with these individuals.

Increased Isolation—Adolescents who are experiencing violence tend to withdraw, isolating themselves from others. Students experiencing violence tend to skip school, pretend to be sick, or become ill and depressed.

Loss of Self-esteem—Students blame themselves for abuse, becoming more vulnerable to abuse. They do not learn how to take action to protect themselves. Without these skills and little self-respect, they lose self-esteem.

Vulnerability at Work—When students do not have skills to deal with aggression and violence directed at them at school, they will have difficulty coping with similar situations that arise in the workplace. They need to know how to peacefully manage conflict in a respectful way.

Generational Impact—Violence modeled is violence learned. Each generation learns violent abusive behavior from the previous generation as it has been modeled and socialized. If education does not address gender-based violence with today's students, the problem will continue to escalate in future generations.

Recommendations for Schools

Gender-based violence is a complex issue. It affects the home, the school, and the community. Experts and educators are still trying to understand the links between gender-role stereotypes and violence. Until now, specific programs have addressed violence by targeting specific issues such as date rape, sexual harassment, and gang violence. Educators need to take a more comprehensive approach as these issues have the same underlying factors of inequity, power, violence, and rigid gender-roles. Schools have the flexibility and expertise to build such a model throughout the K-12 curriculum, teaching nonviolence, equity, and mutual respect.

"Schools may reinforce gender-role stereotyping and potential violence by not discussing the issue."

School districts can address the issue of gender-based violence. Administrators and teaching staff can develop policies and procedures to help students reveal violent incidences and give due process and support to victims. They can address curriculum needs on gender-based violence and its surrounding issues. In addition, they can

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence includes the occurrence of one or more of the following acts between family or household members who reside together or have resided together: (1) attempting to cause or recklessly causing bodily injury; (2) placing another person by the threat of force in fear of imminent, serious harm--either physical, emotional, sexual, or mental; and (3) committing any act with respect to a child that would result in the child being an abused child. In Statman (1995),

- One American woman out of every two will be physically abused at some time in her life by the man she loves and lives with.
- One of every 12 women is battered while she is pregnant.
- One-third to one-half of all batterers will abuse their children.

Jake and Tanya have been married for ten years. Jake is dissatisfied with how Tanya manages their home and behaves as his wife. He calls her "fatso" because she is twenty pounds overweight. He does not like how she cleans the house and prepares meals, daily telling her "Can't you do anything right?" Tanya must ask Jake for money as he has taken away all credit cards and does not give her any cash regularly. Tanya has become more withdrawn and does not see many of her family members or friends. Jake tells her he wants her all to himself. If she goes somewhere, she must call when she arrives and when she is ready to leave. Jake demands sex every Saturday morning and Sunday night. Tanya is starting to feel depressed but does not know what to do.

Maureen and Luke met last year at a bar. Maureen is attractive, financially secure, and interested in marriage. Luke is good-looking, charming, and outgoing. Three months ago they decided to live together in Maureen's apartment. After Luke moved in, he changed. He was not attentive to Maureen and often he would slap her. Sometimes he even grabbed her upper arms and shook her. Once he pushed her down the outside steps and she fell. The next day Luke bought Maureen flowers and apologized, promising to never push her again. The next week, Luke shoved her into the closet after Maureen said she wanted to go see her best friend that night. Maureen loves Luke and wants to make him happy. She tries to please him. She believes she must be doing something wrong for him to be so angry.

develop formal relationships with community service providers such as domestic violence shelters, crisis centers, human services, and law enforcement agencies. They can also develop programs in collaboration with community agencies to teach parents and other family members about violence, its prevalence, and its impact upon the family, school, and community.

Finally, school districts need to train teachers and other staff members in the issues of gender-based violence, including legal issues of disclosure, confidentiality, student rights, and trust and safety issues. Key concepts to include are:

- Violence exists along a continuum as a range of behavior that begins from internalizing rigid messages on how males and females should be acting to actual verbal slurs, harassment, battering, rape, and murder.
- The roots of gender-based violence include gender and race stereotyping, rigid role expectations, and power as control. Maleness and femaleness are something that one *is*, not something one *does*. A person does not earn or prove his or her gender.
- Without prevention and intervention, the school environment often promotes and/or ignores gender-based violence and its roots.
- Educators must alter the attitude that violence is an acceptable means of conflict resolution. People must learn to peaceably resolve interpersonal conflict and not use violence to resolve conflict. Everyone needs to learn to cope with anger and jealousy, especially sexual jealousy.
- The laws ensuring safety and equity are for the protection and benefit of everyone.

"Students can unlearn their tolerance of violence."

Besides training teachers and other staff members in these key concepts, administrators need to develop and communicate guidelines for teachers and other staff members. Teachers and staff members need to know how to determine the amount of disclosure that they might appropriately and comfortably share with students if someone has victimized them in their own past. Some staff members may need to seek community support services for past experiences that surface because of this training.

Individual schools and teachers are on the front line combating gender-based violence. Specifically, they can:

- Exhibit respectful behavior and not tolerate sexist, degrading conversation about males or females.
- Expect mutually-respectful, nonviolent behavior from boys and girls.
- Use gender-neutral language.
- Avoid subtly communicating biased expectations to students.
- Assign chores or duties without regard to sex.
- Use nonsexist printed and visual materials.
- Talk about gender-based violence with students, defining harassment, dating violence, rape, family violence, homophobic violence, etc.
- Talk with students about why they will or will not report harassment, dating, violence, homophobic violence, etc.
- Create a safe environment that assures confidentiality and nonjudgment.

Through the efforts of educators to teach and model violent-free, egalitarian relationships, students can unlearn their tolerance of violence. The long-term effect of such teaching has the potential to make the workplace more equitable, family life more peaceful, and individuals more respectful of each person's unique gifts as a valuable person in our world.

> The examples used throughout this publication are composites created from actual events. Any resemblance to specific cases is purely coincidental. These examples include situations that are not isolated instances but common situations found in schools.

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Equity Exchange is published quarterly by the Department of Home Economics Education, College of Human Ecology, The Ohio State University, 347 Campbell Hall, 1787 Neil Ave, Columbus, OH 43210 and is supported in whole by federal funds of PL 101-392 through the Ohio Department of Education, Division of Vocational and Adult Education. Pat Clark, Editor.

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